

## The Newt in Matilda

Who would guess that one slimy, icky little amphibian could change an entire story? That is just what happens with the newt in the book 'Matilda' by Roald Dahl.

### Origins of the Newt

Every week, the horrible Miss Trunchbull takes it upon herself to teach each class in her school for a short time. The headmistress does this in spite of her disdain for children, and she frequently uses the time to bully them in whatever ways she can possibly think of.

She demands a pitcher of water and glass be placed on her desk prior to her visit with each class, and one fateful week this job falls to Matilda's **intrepid** (fearless) friend, Lavender. Lavender, feeling the need to stand up to Miss Trunchbull in some small way, puts a **newt**, or small lizard/frog-like amphibian, into the pitcher. This action changes the course of the story.



*Newts are amphibians, meaning they live on land and in water.*

### The Newt Episode

When Miss Trunchbull comes to Matilda's class, she behaves in her usual manner. She verbally and physically assaults the children and is generally terrible to them. Doling out all this abuse must make her very thirsty, so she picks up the pitcher and pours herself a glass of water. Only there is a surprise for her! The newt splashes out of the pitcher and right into her glass.

Miss Trunchbull immediately suspects Matilda in the prank and really lets her have it. Miss Trunchbull goes on a long, insulting tirade and calls Matilda every name in the book. Matilda attempts to stand up for herself, shouting her innocence to the beastly woman. Miss Trunchbull does not believe her, and makes Matilda "shut up at once and sit down."

## A Small Victory

The fuming Matilda sits down in her seat, but she is so angry that she can't contain it. She focuses all of her energy on the newt in its glass and finds herself willing it to tip over. She feels as though lasers are shooting out of her eyes as she gets angrier and angrier. Then a miracle happens!

The glass tips onto Miss Trunchbull, spilling the water and the newt all over Miss Trunchbull's chest. "The headmistress let out a yell that must have rattled every window-pane in the building." She throws the newt on the floor, and Lavender discreetly puts it back into her pencil box without being noticed.

Miss Trunchbull tries to blame Matilda again (and this time she actually was responsible!), but her classmates come to her aid. The children all agree that Matilda couldn't have done it from her seat, and Miss Trunchbull is left utterly humiliated. This episode marks Matilda's first small victory against her nemesis.

## The Significance of the Newt Episode

While the newt episode is important because it is the first time Matilda punishes Miss Trunchbull, it has an even greater significance. It alerts Matilda to her special ability. Without knowing ahead of time that she could do it, Matilda discovers that she can move objects with her mind. In other words, she has the power of **telekinesis**! This realization is a turning point in the book that leads to Matilda's ultimate revenge against Miss Trunchbull.

## Lesson Summary

What happens with the **newt** in *Matilda* seems like a pretty small event in the grand scheme of the book, but it is incredibly important. The **intrepid** Lavender's scheme turns into the moment Matilda realizes her power of **telekinesis** and eventually leads to the story's resolution.

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